

THE BEAUTY OF GOING DOWN TO THE VERY BOTTOM

I have read a part of Philippians 3 [vv. 1-16], desiring to look at it as bringing before us what were the principles of the life of Paul and of the Christians of his day. We see here, if we turn to the early part of the epistle, what the circumstances were in which he lived upon these principles, the extent to which he carried them out, and the contrast between his doing it imperfectly, and the One who did it perfectly—the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is remarkable the very bold claim he makes in the first three verses of this chapter, as to himself and those he calls his brethren being the only true worshipers of God, and that in contrast to certain other persons. Those he calls his brethren were those who were looking out for the Lord Jesus Christ; and those who walked not like Him, were those whose religion began and ended with themselves.

“*Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord*”. God was before them, and they so saw the Lord Jesus as to be able to rejoice in Him; and Paul so saw Him as to make him [Paul] appeal to these Philippians to rejoice in Him, and that by the power of the Spirit sent into their hearts. There was a class of people, who, instead of having everything connected with another world, and finding all their joy in God, were just occupying themselves with things down here. He says of them, “*Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision*”. That is the distinct contrast between religion of the Spirit and in truth, and the Ritualism [religious profession] of today.

Then Paul takes up himself, as one who had a right to speak on the subject, and he says as to religion, “*Can anyone come forth and measure himself by me?*” That is what my pretensions might be as to confidence in the flesh. “*Though I might also have confidence in the flesh, etc*”. All these things were connected with the man down here.

Verse 5. Things that give something to myself, all gain to me; I was the persons on whom they were all strung. Paul says, “*I have something that you have not, and it is gain to me. But I saw a Person on whom all glory was strung, on whom it was all heaped up*”. Well, what follows that? Who took all the beauty out of what he was esteeming and glorying in? A certain Person in heaven—truly despised and rejected by men down here, whom men by wicked hands had crucified and slain. God placed Him in heaven, and He called Saul of Tarsus, and now he says, “*What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ*.” “*I could not stand connected with Christ, and have all those things that were gain to myself; I became a prey to Christ. He took possession of me when I was striving with all my might to blot out the name of the Nazarene. He appeared to me, and I was glad to suffer the loss of all things for the beauty of Christ*.”

Oh, what is it when the Lord Jesus reveals Himself to Saul; that One who had, perhaps, only been known to him as a character in history! He knew there was such a Man as Jesus of Nazareth. When that Man in heaven lets the light of His own glory in on a soul, what is it? Well Paul had no difficulty in saying what it was to him. He said, “*I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for whom i have suffered the loss of all thing, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him*.”

The doctrine of Peter on the day of Pentecost was that they should draw near to the throne of God, on which Jesus was sitting; they should receive forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, but they must come in the name of Jesus. As though God had said, “*You found no beauty in Him; but see what My thoughts are. I have raised Him from the dead; and now anybody who draws near in His name shall receive forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost*.” God vindicates His own conduct. If God was obliged to hide His face from the Son of His love on the cross, He now does something that stands out in bright contrast: “*Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool*”.

Glory Of The One Who Emptied Himself

When Paul saw Him, everything he had as a man was gone. He saw Christ in heaven, and he got thoroughly cleared our of all things—natural religion, etc.—and thoroughly filled with the thought of the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Now, what was it that struck the apostle? Was it merely that the Son of God had been given to be the sin offering—to put away sin? Or was it, in addition to that, that God had presented His righteousness to him? Far, far more than that: his soul was taken possession of by the Spirit of God, giving him a sight of the beauty

of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the One who had emptied Himself and brought out this moral glory.

The principle of man is to get as high as he can; that is the principle which Adam and Eve acted on. God's principle is exactly the contrary. That of the Lord Jesus Christ was to go down to the bottom, and accomplish certain things at the bottom. But that was not all. He showed out the mind of God. It struck the apostle as something worth imitating—as something worth following out. "*That I may know Him*"—not merely the forgiveness of sins—not merely the righteousness of God—but he was caught with the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he takes that as his principle, as something to act on, to mold and fashion his life.

As the Lord presented Himself, there was everything to attract the poor sinner. There was the Lord living, sitting upon the throne of God. I see Him coming down to bear our sins. He bore the curse for me, and do you say, "I do not see any beauty in that One coming down from heaven to become a Man, and bear the wrath of God for me"? Not see any beauty in that?! I could not say that, if I only saw my own benefit by it—forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost; but there is far more than that—there is the beauty of the conduct of the Lord in taking this place. That is called the moral glory—the beauty of the ways of God.

The apostle Paul says, "If Christ has gone down to the bottom, I cannot go there, but I will go down as low as I possibly can. He had taken the bottom place, I will try and stand next to Him in humility."

Divine Condescension

I want to look at that, for I am in a world in which everyone is selfish. If you get to God as scripture presents Him, you see, "*In the beginning was the Word*". There was Father, Son, and Holy Ghost before creation. There was creation in heaven—angels were created. When you think of God as Creator, bringing everything into existence, taking the dust of the earth and building a man—do you not see the very principle of condescension coming down? Did He want the world for Himself? All creation is a display of the condescension of God. Why does not the earth reel to and fro? Because Someone holds up the pillars thereof. God comes down in providence. All the little things are connected with condescension. The Lord Jesus knew all about it; He said, "*Not a sparrow shall fall to the ground without your Father*". Look at the world, always rebelling against God, and yet He still keeps things in check; the whole process of His government is condescension.

If I look at the Lord, there was Messiah to come, and that One is seen in Daniel 7 in the presence of the Ancient of days. But I see Him in the gospel, born in a manger, not in the palace of Herod. Was it not the same principle? I find it comes into Scripture in one place in a remarkable way. Rom. 5:7: "*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die*". If you were to point out a man to me, and say, "That is a very righteous man, he would not be in debt to anybody". I should say, "I expect he is a very self-righteous man". It would not move my affections at all. But if you show me another man, and say, "That is a very tenderhearted man; if he hears of distress anywhere, he delights to go and relieve it." My heart would immediately warm towards him.

When I look into the whole heart of man who is the one my whole heart goes out to? Not the people who are climbing up, but those who are willing to go to the bottom. I would say more if I could of the earthly relationships of the heavenly family—parents counting themselves nothing for children. The father of a family and the mother, how constantly they are going to the bottom.

Paul's Pattern

Let me just call attention to the apostle Paul. He says he is the off scouring of all things—a model man in that respect. He says he is the offscouring of all things—a model man in that respect. He gives an account of his sufferings as surpassing all of his day—the man set forth to show how far the principles shown out in the life of Christ could be carried out in a man of like passions with ourselves. And, were there ever men like those apostles, through whom came all these blessings?

Paul had seen the beauty of it in Christ—seen it, no doubt, in two forms. First, the only way in which blessing could come to the sinner, was by Christ's coming down lower than the sinner, when He bore the course! I have never borne the course—if I do not believe in Christ, I shall. He bore it, and went to show that Satan could say nothing. Secondly, Paul saw more—he saw the beauty of the ways of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me ask you, do you see the beauty of those ways? Is sit saying, "Oh I see He went down, and I suppose I must go down—I suppose I must take up the cross"?

There is that verse, “*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross*”. Does that mean to take up as little of the cross as possible—let the heaviest end be upon Him? Is it merely “He went down, I must”? That was not Paul: he had another feeling than “must”—more than “needs be”. God took up Paul, and he was resolutely set; he would go down to the very bottom. “I mean to follow His ways, I will be like Him in my walk, He came down to the very bottom, and I mean to follow that beauty”.

In this world while he was here, Paul was never seeking his own, always the things of Christ, and what comes out? In this world Paul followed Him, and by-and-by he will have Christ as his gain. When the Lord Jesus comes for His own, there will be no self-denial any longer.

Beauty In Christ

Do you see any beauty in that conduct of Christ’s? Could I say to the Lord Jesus Christ, “Lord, there was a needs be for the curse to be borne by some one, and it was good of Thee to bear it, but what a pity it was the occasion of bringing Thee so low; there is no beauty in Thy coming so low”. No indeed! I could not say it. For *height* nobody like Him! For *depth* nobody like Him! And has He given me of His Spirit, and I see no beauty in that? And have I got, like the apostle Paul, a desire for fellowship in His sufferings? Not as some people make out, that it does not mean literally what it says: “*Filling up that which was behind in the sufferings of Christ*”. Paul never had anything to do with making atonement for sin; Christ had done all that, but Paul did think of having fellowship in Christ’s sufferings in his care for the Church—carrying his life in his hand—he counted everything that belonged to himself as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.

Well, he will one day be in the presence of his Lord—a very sweet thought to his and to the believer’s heart now. If he had been apprehended for something, Christ had apprehended him: “*I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus*”.

Do you know what it is to look at the Lord Jesus now in heaven and say, “Lord, thou knowest all the glory which God the Father gave Thee to bring to me: Thou hast done a work on the cross, and I am clean every whit: and Thou hast given me the Spirit, guarding and guiding all my life down here; and Though knowest exactly what it will be when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal, immortality, and when this vile body shall be made like Thy glorious body, and Thou shalt have subdued all things to Thyself”?

Do you ever think of what is the thought of the Lord Jesus in glory? It would be like the potter working on a vessel, but what is in the mind of the potter? Here has the Lord been dealing with me all these years, but what has been in the mind of the Potter all that time? It has been no haphazard work. He knew where He would conduct me. The Son could say, “*I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again.*” The Father had perfect delight in Him, and has He not let me already into the Father’s heart? And does not the Son know that I am predestinated to be conformed to Himself?

We cannot see Him with our eyes, or hear Him with our ears; when He intercedes we cannot hear Him; but that Lord, as He looks down upon us, has His thoughts about His glory in us; He will have us in the Father’s house, and what is His glory all the way through? This blessed way of humiliation.

Divine Humility

There is all the difference possible between this and a voluntary humility, that is, making yourself the center of everything. The Lord says, “*Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God*”. The Colossians said, “*touch not; taste not; handle not;*”. This is called a voluntary humility. That is not Christ taking up the Father’s pleasure, who is saying, “Now sin is come in, it will cost Thee a great deal to clear their way to Me, and Mine to them—there will be a deal of trouble in bringing them home; but then there is all the blessing and glory after—the fund of it in the joy of having them here”.

The Church is the vessel to hold the glory of the Lamb. Is it not condescension on the part of Christ to dwell in such poor creatures as we are? To be sure it is, and the principle I want to press is the giving up of all human thoughts about what is great and praiseworthy, and taking up God’s thoughts. Wherever we find Him, He is always stepping down to such poor things as you and me, bring us up to Himself.

Philippians Chapter One

Let us turn to chapter 1. It brings out in a special way the circumstances in which Paul was living out the life of Christ. He was a prisoner in Rome, probably chained to a soldier, many trying to increase his troubles. They were the circumstances of a martyr really. What does he say about such circumstances? “Do not be troubled about things, about these people trying to add affliction to my bonds; it will all turn to my salvation, and Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or death.”

If I had heard that from anyone, I should have said, “That is too sharp. What? Christ made bigger by you! The Lord of all glory magnified by you! How can you speak of the Lord being magnified whether you live or die?” Christ was made to appear a great deal more plainly by the circumstances Paul passed through here. He is in spirit above the clouds with Christ, and has got such a love for the One who is always occupied with him, looking at him, that he does not care about anything. Whether he lives or dies, Christ will be magnified. The he puts it into a very concise form, “*To me to live is Christ, to die is gain.*” My life as a Christian is Christ; certainly it includes more than Christ being the object.

The life to live is Christ. The first impression on my heart when I was converted was, “*Enoch walked with God*”. That was my start: “Now, then I will walk with God”. Beautiful as far as it went, but I very soon found, as Luther said to Melancthon, “You will find old Melancthon stronger than young Philip.” I came to my wits’ end; for I wanted a fund whence to draw, so as to live it out. You are unable to live out of resources in yourself; you must not act as though your life is separate; Christ must be the fountain.

If a believer gets to this—“*To me to live is Christ*”—he must think of Christ not merely as the end of all he does, but as the fountain. God must put us back to do this. In all the actings of life I want the present help of Christ. Who is the noble man down here? A man always living to himself, perhaps giving money to charitable purposes, or the man living to Christ? Not merely that Christ is the fountain, but the principle on which our life is led. Whether eating, drinking, waking or sleeping, doing all as to the Lord. How can it be otherwise? How can I live independent of the life in my body? It is all connected with the life of Christ in me. We have eternal life; how can this life be independent of Christ?

“*To me to live is Christ*”. Do I see Him by faith there in heaven? He is there in God’s presence, saying, “I died for you, that in grace you might come up here. I gave you forgiveness of sins; now I want your services, the services of every believer.” It is the secret of everything as to liberty and power. Paul saw it and clave to the living Christ. The Ephesians saw and rejoiced in it; but in afteryears they forgot the living Christ, and were exceedingly busy with their own duties as to being a candlestick, not only as to the living Christ, but in all the busy diligence of being a candlestick down here. In all this they had forgotten their first love; and lost immensely. While we are down here the eye of faith must be fixed on a certain Person, all beautiful and glorious, all excellent in glory, whose heart is jealous that you should live in Him in every minute particular.

Chapter 3

In Chapter 3 he shows you his boast. You say, “How confident!”. Here I am Christ’s gain, and I have Him before me as my gain. Personals may say, “That is too strong.” “No;” says Paul, “I will show you One (chapter 2) not like myself, but who walked this path with a whole heart perfectly—the One I am following.” He passed right down to the cross. But who has placed Him in heaven, rewarding Him for all that is done? “*Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given him a name which is above every name That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of [things] in heaven, and [things] in earth, and [things] under the earth; And [that] every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ [is] Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” He puts Him into a place as Man there. How came Jesus there? He came from the home of the Father—from the throne eternal, to show God’s character on earth, and He did it perfectly.

If I am following Paul, I find myself perfectly free. I often feel myself called upon to see how Paul carries out his doctrine—he failed, I always see, on the side that people do not fail upon now. He was devoted beyond discretion sometimes—a devotedness that was not always quite discreet. He spoke to the people from the stairs! Nowadays people look carefully before they put their foot down on the mud, or on a flint, even in the path they ought to follow.

The blessed Lord was perfect. He was the Man with one idea, one thought—“*Lo, I come to do thy will.*” His meat, to do His Father’s will, and He did it perfectly. I see in Him two things—the spirit of obedience and dependence.

What a marvelous person a Christian is, if he be really dependent on Christ! Paul’s heart was stolen

away by Christ. Are your hearts dependent on that living Person? It is wonderful if a soul is dependent on Christ; he knows he has nothing down here to do but to be dependent on Him. He tells me His own mind, I tell Him mine. The Lord and I understand each other well. He knows how to minister that for which I am dependent on Him. Are you dependent in spirit? And then is there this obedience of spirit that takes notice of what God Himself is, stooping down as He does? In highest light, which no man has seen, or can see, yet goes down into the depths, and tells us all that He has done for us! The glory came out from down-stooping, in which He presented His moral glory.

— G. V. Wigram —

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